

REFLECTIONS ON 100 YEARS OF *RHODORA*

JANET R. SULLIVAN, Editor-in-Chief

One hundred years ago the New England Botanical Club began publication of its journal, *Rhodora* (volume 1, number 1 was published in January, 1899). The Editor-in-Chief was Benjamin Lincoln Robinson of Harvard University. He was assisted by Associate Editors Frank Shipley Collins, Merritt Lyndon Fernald, and Hollis Webster, and members of the Publication Committee, William Penn Rich and Edward Lothrop Rand. The first issue of the journal comprised 20 pages of text and two plates, and was distributed to approximately 600 subscribers who had paid \$1.00 each for the year's 12 issues.

That first issue of *Rhodora* opened with an editorial announcement (Editorial 1899) outlining the purpose of the journal (“... with confidence that it will give new stimulus and render material aid to the study of our local flora.”) and describing the types of articles to be published. The expectations seem modest but inclusive and are clearly stated: that “... special attention will be given to such plants as are newly recognized or imperfectly known within our limits, to the more precise determination of plant ranges, to brief revisions of groups in which specific and varietal limits require further definition, to corrections upon current manuals and local floras, to altitudinal distribution, plant associations, and ecological problems.” It was the intention of the editors to consider all contributions dealing with the “... flowering plants, ferns, mosses, and thallophytes ...”; presumably they intended to include the gymnosperms, as well. The announcement also states that “A decided preference will be given to articles which embody some newly observed fact, tersely stated.”

The contents of the first issue encompass the angiosperms, fungi, and algae, with short papers and notes on rattlesnake plantains (Fernald 1899), *Myosotis collina* (Williams 1899), *Sanicula* (Brauner 1899), fringed gentian (Deane 1899), wild lettuce (Robinson 1899), *Matricaria discoidea* (Manning 1899), algae (Collins 1899a), and fleshy fungi (Webster 1899). It is interesting to note, in these days when we are so conscious of the importance of peer review and the avoidance of conflict of interest, that all four of

the editorial staff members were contributors to this first issue! Like a club newsletter might, the issue includes a listing of new NEBC officers, reports of meetings of other botanical clubs in New England, and a request for subscribers to report on the occurrence of inland populations of halophytes. The final announcement in the issue is a sort of "coming attractions," describing articles promised for the early issues of *Rhodora* and making an appeal for the submission of announcements of local floras in preparation.

During the period of the celebration of the Club's centennial in 1996 I became intrigued by the events that had transpired so long ago, resulting in a club and a journal I had respected, admired, and enjoyed since starting my formal study of botany in college in the 1970s. The year of the Club's centennial was also my first year as Editor-in-Chief of *Rhodora*; by the end of this year I had a new appreciation of what is involved in the production of a scientific journal. What activities of the Club's members warranted such an undertaking? Why did the NEBC decide to publish what was then a monthly journal?

INITIATING PUBLICATION OF A BOTANICAL JOURNAL

The New England Botanical Club was established in February of 1896 "for the promotion of social intercourse and the dissemination of local and general information among gentlemen interested in the flora of New England" (Minutes of the 3rd Club meeting, February 5, 1896). By December of that year the members judged that the endeavor had been successful: the "faithful workers in the cause of botany," having been isolated previously, were meeting monthly, except during the summer, to share conversation and information about the New England flora as well as about new research and developments of botanical and ecological interest worldwide. In addition, the members of the Club had been true to their goal of providing "an elaboration of the New England flora," by accumulating specimens for the Club's herbarium (now NEBC), and by stimulating interest among the membership to provide local floras and plant lists. At the annual meeting in December, 1896, it was stated that "A plan for consolidating the information thus secured will shortly be presented to you." It was apparently from this interest in the dissemination

of information about the flora of New England that the idea of publishing a botanical journal evolved.

By the fall of 1897 (Minutes of the 8th Council meeting, October 22, 1897), Dr. B. L. Robinson announced that Mr. F. S. Collins "... had his marine algae in such shape as to be ready to submit his list to the members of the Club before incorporating it in the checklist of New England plants." There were several local floras already in existence when the Club was organized two winters earlier, and the members had begun accumulating plant lists to be incorporated into a checklist of New England plants. In May and June of that year, Robinson's Publication Committee had requested help from the members in accumulating information for a checklist, particularly with verifying specimens and literature accounts. The effort to put together a checklist not only increased the holdings of the Club's herbarium, but eventually led to the publication of *Rhodora* and the revision of *Gray's Manual of Botany*.

The announcement that F. S. Collins was close to being able to submit his list for distribution sparked "... an exhaustive examination of the various systems of multiplication of writing" By vote, the Council approved "... that Dr. Robinson investigate the possibilities of getting original papers to be submitted to the Club, hektographed by an assistant and that Mr. Collins' list be hektographed for distribution as an experiment provided the rate of cost be satisfactory" [The hektograph was a predecessor of the spirit duplicator. Invented during the 1870s, it used a stiff gelatin pad and an aniline dye ink to produce copies.]

By February of 1898 (Minutes of the 10th Council meeting, February 21, 1898), the members of the Council were seriously discussing the publication of a "... Bulletin to publish botanical results arrived at by members of the Club and to become the organ of Descriptive Botany in New England." Dr. Robinson was ready to bring the matter before the Club in a formal proposal. The motion to appoint a committee to explore the possibility of producing a publication was carried unanimously at the Club meeting on March 4. At the next Council meeting (Minutes of the 12th Council meeting, March 23, 1898) Robinson presented an exhaustive report by the Publication Committee, and it was recommended that two members be appointed as a Financial Committee to investigate what support might be available for a serial publication. At the April meeting of the Club, E. L. Rand

submitted a report by the committee which reviewed the different ways the publication could be supported, and recommended that not less than 400 subscriptions be obtained. The committee felt confident that the journal could be published without likelihood of failure with this number of subscriptions, and that "... any deficiency of income during the early stages could readily be met." Members of the Club present at the meeting exhibited a great deal of interest in the suggested publication.

In the Club scrapbook there is an unsigned, handwritten report dated "abt Mar 1898" which outlines the details of the journal recommended by the Publication Committee. It specifies a "... monthly issue of 16 pages and cover ... with illustrations to consist of six plates per year to be assigned free of charge to authors whose articles seem most in need of illustration ..." The report also notes the attributes desired of the first cover page, with "... the other three pages of cover to be used for advertising when appropriate and dignified advertisements are available." These advertisements were later to prove controversial, and soon were dropped from the journal.

The original proposal recommended that each author receive 25 free reprints of articles exceeding one page. The cost of the publication, including wrapping and mailing of 500 copies, was estimated to be \$550.00 for the first year, although this was crossed out and \$600.00 was penciled in above. The cost of an annual subscription was set at \$1.00.

In April of 1898, a printed circular was distributed to the members of the Club announcing that the publication of a monthly journal was being considered, and requesting the assistance of Club members in obtaining subscriptions (Figure 1). The note accompanying the flier suggested that an average of 10 subscribers procured by each resident member (meaning members residing within 25 miles of Boston, where monthly meetings were held), and five by each nonresident member would assure the necessary financial support of the publication.

By the June meeting of the Council (Minutes of the 14th Council meeting, June 23, 1898), E. L. Rand reported that 450 subscriptions had been taken, and Robinson asked that the matter of organization of an editorial board be brought to a vote. The Council was in favor of immediate action and appointed B. L. Robinson as Editor-in-Chief, and F. S. Collins, M. L. Fernald, and Hollis Webster as Associate Editors. This editorial board, in con-

GEORGE L. GOODALE, - - - - President.
JOSEPH R. CHURCHILL, - Vice-President.
EMILE F. WILLIAMS, - - - - Treasurer.
EDWARD L. RAND, Corresponding Secretary.

New England Botanical Club.

THE NEW ENGLAND BOTANICAL CLUB is considering the publication of a monthly journal, to begin January 1, 1899. It is to be an octavo of about sixteen pages each issue, and illustrated by full-page plates. It will deal primarily with the flora of New England, especial attention being given to rare plants, extended ranges of distribution, and newly introduced, as well as newly described, species. Articles have been already promised by many of the foremost New England Botanists, both professional and amateur, and, while a high standard will be maintained in the matter of scientific accuracy, needless technicality of style will be carefully avoided, so that any person who can use "Gray's Manual" will be able to read the proposed journal with pleasure and interest. Not only the flowering plants and ferns, but fleshy fungi and other cryptogams, will receive attention. The price of the journal has been fixed at one dollar per annum.

While more than two hundred subscriptions have already been promised in advance, the Club does not feel warranted in proceeding with its plan of publication unless assured of much further support. All persons interested in botany and in the maintenance of such a journal in New England, are earnestly solicited to send at once subscriptions for at least one year (which, however, need not be paid before January 15, 1899), to

EDWARD L. RAND,

Corresponding Secretary N. E. Botanical Club,

740 Exchange Building,

Boston, Mass.

APRIL 15, 1898.

Figure 1. Copy of a flier announcing the New England Botanical Club's intention to begin publication of a monthly journal and soliciting subscriptions.

junction with the already established Publication Committee, was charged with the responsibility of making the business arrangements necessary.

Once the editorial board was established, the Council discussed the name of the journal; in an informal vote the name "Rhodora" was chosen unanimously, but it was decided to defer the matter to a vote of the Club. At the October Club meeting (October 7, 1898) E. L. Rand reported to the members present that over 600 subscriptions had been secured, "... thereby insuring the financial support deemed necessary for a beginning." The editorial staff had "... assumed the responsibility of the business of the journal ..." and Dr. Robinson was called upon to state what had been done in regard to naming the journal. "In response ... Dr. Robinson said the name of the journal had been given the most earnest consideration from the time the project was first discussed. He explained the very great advantages resulting from the use of a single name, not only as being more direct and definite in the minds of the botanical public, but as being vastly more convenient for the purposes of citation." He described the informal vote in favor of "Rhodora" at the June meeting of the Council, and there followed "... a good deal of discussion among the members in regard to the name proposed." There were strong opinions on both sides of the issue, and the matter was deferred for final action to the next meeting of the Club.

At the 27th Club meeting on November 4, 1898, the subject of a name for the journal was again taken up. There was a great deal of discussion, during which several names were proposed, and eventually an informal ballot was taken. Jesse Greenman was appointed by the Chair to collect the ballots and report the results (Figure 2). "Mr. Rich, seconded by Mr. Kidder, then moved that the Club adopt the name 'Rhodora, Journal of the New England Botanical Club,' as the official title of the proposed publication and the motion was carried with only one or two dissenting votes."

Thus the journal was underway, after a year of formal discussion and preparation. The Club ended its third year on a high and hopeful note; the members felt secure that the new journal would be self-sustaining, at least at the start, and that its publication "... would reach far and wide, not only our non-resident members ... but also the great botanical world, who knows us not." In the summary statements closing the meeting, the new journal

For	Rhodora	fifteen	votes
"	Oakeia	five	"
"	Watsonia	two	"
"	Bigelovia	one	"
"	Hayia	one	"
"	Novaklingha	one	"
"	either Rhodora or Bigelovia	one	vote

Figure 2. Tally of votes taken on the name of the new journal (from the Minutes of the 27th Club meeting, November 4, 1898).

was noted as the highlight of the Club's achievements: "... the Club now has a voice ... It remains for the members to make that voice heard for the best interests of our favorite science and the result we hope will justify the establishment and maintenance of the Club. This is a momentous period for us and the prosperity and perhaps even the existence of the Club will depend upon the faithfulness with which each one contributes to the success of our undertaking. The labor we have undertaken is great, but as members of the New England Botanical Club, we should be untrue to our aims and ideals if we did not make the effort to attain them."

These powerful and encouraging words still ring true today; while the existence of the Club may not depend on the publication of the journal, both the existence and quality of the journal still depend primarily upon the contributions and dedication of Club members.

PUBLISHING A BOTANICAL JOURNAL

The work had only just begun. The editorial staff and many other members of the Club spent the first year of the journal's publication encouraging the submission of manuscripts, soliciting new subscriptions, obtaining advertisements to help defray costs, and working to maintain the monthly publication schedule.

Publication costs were higher than originally anticipated, due to the decision to electrotype each page. In addition, the inclusion of an index had not been part of the original calculations, and

toward the end of the first year it was estimated that the deficit might be as much as \$200. In April of 1899 (Minutes of the 18th Council meeting, April 21, 1899) the Council voted to cover the expense of publishing the New England Checklist (\$35), including providing one set of reprints free to each member of the Club. Emile Williams was appointed to obtain subscriptions adequate to meet the journal's deficit for 1899. Over the next few years *Rhodora* consistently ran a deficit, and regular appropriations of funds were made by the Club to support the journal, sometimes at the expense of increasing the holdings of the Club's herbarium. Nevertheless, the subscription rate was not raised until 1912, when the price of receiving the year's issues went from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per year.

In those early years, the journal carried advertisements to help defray the costs of publishing plates. Both W. P. Rich and E. L. Rand had addressed the Club, describing to the members the desirability of securing advertisements in order to enable the editors to increase the number of pages and to publish more and better plates. The earliest advertisements were for booksellers, collections of dried and live plant specimens, and the "Nurseryman's Directory." After the excursion to Mount Katahdin by five NEBC members in July 1900, an advertisement appeared offering "Katahdin on Horseback" (volume 3, 1901). The charge for a 4" × 3/4" space was quoted as \$4.00 per year (volume 5, 1903).

The largest ads, running from one to four full pages, were purchased by the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad and offered rail passage to remote plant collecting sites. These ads immediately proved controversial, because they itemized locations of rare species in addition to offering safe, comfortable passage. An editorial published in volume 3 (Editorial 1901) defended the ads and the naming of rare species, stating that the plants in question were abundant at the sites to be visited, and adding that some of the species mentioned were considered weeds by farmers or were timber pests. The ads continued to be published during 1901, but the controversy led to diminishing numbers of ads of all kinds over the next few years and advertising was dropped from the journal by volume 9 (1907).

From a scientific standpoint, the Club's members were 'entirely satisfied' with their new journal. The early volumes of *Rhodora* were filled with short papers and notes outlining the distribution of particular species in the New England states, describing "note-

worthy specimens” with unusual morphology, and providing additions to the checklist. One of the most quaint articles described the effects of an inadvertent *Boletus* poisoning at a brunch held at the home of one of the editors, F. S. Collins (Collins 1899b), and argued for better identification manuals for the region’s flora.

The journal also featured short articles detailing meetings, field trips, and histories of other botanical clubs in New England, such as the Connecticut Valley Botanical Society, the Josselyn Botanical Society, the Vermont Botanical Club, and the Boston Mycological Club. Short book reviews and obituaries started appearing in volume 2, as well. Longer articles commemorating the lives of deceased Club members each featured a formal portrait and signature.

Volume 3 devoted a considerable number of pages to a diary kept of the botanical excursion to Mount Katahdin the year before by five members of the Club (Churchill 1901). The editors also allowed publication of seven plates accompanying this article. In addition, members of the party contributed four other articles on the botanical aspects of the trip (Collins 1901; Fernald 1901; Kennedy and Collins 1901; Williams 1901). This was the beginning of a tradition of publishing botanical commentaries on Gray Herbarium and New England Botanical Club expeditions.

Originally, the scientific articles published in *Rhodora* were mostly field observations, though the results of laboratory experiments and study of herbarium specimens started appearing in very early issues. Although notes of one or a few paragraphs continued to be a feature of the journal for many years, the length of articles and their scientific content increased significantly over the first few years of publication.

Nevertheless, manuscripts were difficult to come by in those early years. The members of the editorial staff were frequent contributors to the early issues; a glance at the index to volume 1 shows that Robinson wrote four articles and notes, Collins wrote five, Fernald wrote 15, and Webster wrote eight. The items contributed by the editors amounted to 28% of the total published that year; the percentage was almost as high for volume 2 (25%). This must have been a considerable burden for the editors; B. L. Robinson addressed the problem at a Club meeting, asking the members “. . . to bear in mind *Rhodora* which is much in want of copy . . .” (Minutes of the 45th Club meeting, October 5, 1900). After a few years the journal had a group of supporters

who submitted articles regularly, and in 1929 it was noted that articles by 399 different botanists had been published in *Rhodora* (Editorial 1929). By the 1940s the number of pages published per year had increased considerably, as had the number of plates.

By far the most prolific contributor to the journal was Merritt Lyndon Fernald. An apparently tireless researcher, Fernald published an average of 13 articles and notes per year (range 4–25) from the time the journal was established until his death in 1950. He also served on the editorial board during this entire period, first as an Associate Editor (1899–1928) and then as Editor-in-Chief (1928–1950) after the resignation of B. L. Robinson. His contributions encompass the full spectrum of types of articles published in the journal during its first 52 years; commentaries on botanical expeditions, notes on the distribution of taxa, floristic and taxonomic treatments, descriptions of new species and varieties, details of anomalous plant distribution and morphology, and descriptions of new plant collecting techniques all can be found among the papers he wrote for *Rhodora*. One may wonder whether the journal could have survived the early paucity of manuscript submissions if it had not been for Fernald's contributions.

In addition to the variation in availability of publishable material, the journal suffered an inevitable fluctuation in subscriptions. As late as 1928 members of the NEBC Council were still struggling to improve circulation. Originally, having a subscription to *Rhodora* was not tied to membership in the Club. [It was not until 1968 that women were admitted to the NEBC as members, and not until 1996 that membership was automatic upon application.] It was expected after the first year of publication that there would be a "considerable falling off in subscriptions, many of the first year's subscribers finding it altogether above their interest and understanding." The list of original subscribers surely included some who fell into that category, but the subscription list also must have expanded beyond New England fairly early. At the end of the first year (volume 1, number 12), W. P. Rich called for a prompt renewal of subscriptions, listing the cost as "\$1.00 per year for the United States and Canada, \$1.25 for other countries." Manuscripts were contributed by botanists from outside of New England almost from the start; as early as volume 2 a note appeared by William M. Canby of Wilmington, Delaware (Canby 1900), and in volume 3 a note was published by Charles Bessey of the University of Nebraska (Bessey 1901).

In volume 21, F. S. Collins published the first article about plants occurring outside of North America (Collins 1919). Back issues were already scarce by volume 3, and a special notice published in 1901 encouraged interested readers to send the \$1.50 necessary to secure a copy of the fast-disappearing issues of volume 1. "An early response will be necessary . . ." warned the editor.

In 1900 (volume 2) the journal fell behind in its publication schedule because of a fire at the printing office. "It appears that the entire April issue was destroyed, but as full sets of proofs had been printed and sent the issue will be immediately reprinted with a delay of perhaps three weeks." (Minutes of the 41st Club meeting, April 6, 1900). Luckily, the plates had been stored in a vault and were unharmed by the fire. The journal continued to appear on a monthly basis, more or less on schedule, until 1962 when publication was changed to a quarterly schedule. At this time the subscription rate was raised to \$6.00 per year.

RHODORA TODAY

In some ways the business of publishing a botanical research journal has not changed in the past 100 years, and in other ways it has changed dramatically. We still suffer fluctuations in suitable manuscript submissions and journal circulation, and we still need to maintain a regular publication schedule to satisfy both our subscribers and the U.S. Postal Service. Beyond that, however, the original editorial staff of the journal probably would be amazed at the changes in the complexities of the process. The papers published in *Rhodora* today involve more experimental results than pure description, reflecting that trend in botanical research over the past fifty years. The degree of specialization in research necessitates enlisting the help of reviewers beyond the editorial board. The papers published today are longer than those in the early issues of the journal, and typically include tables and figures. Likely, it has been the increased level of detail in manuscripts, combined with the use of word processors rather than secretaries, that has contributed to the workload and, thus, to the decreasing tenure of editors of *Rhodora* (Figure 3), despite the redistribution of some of the more tedious tasks among the press and editorial board members. Certainly, the authors and members of the Club and its council could not have been any more en-

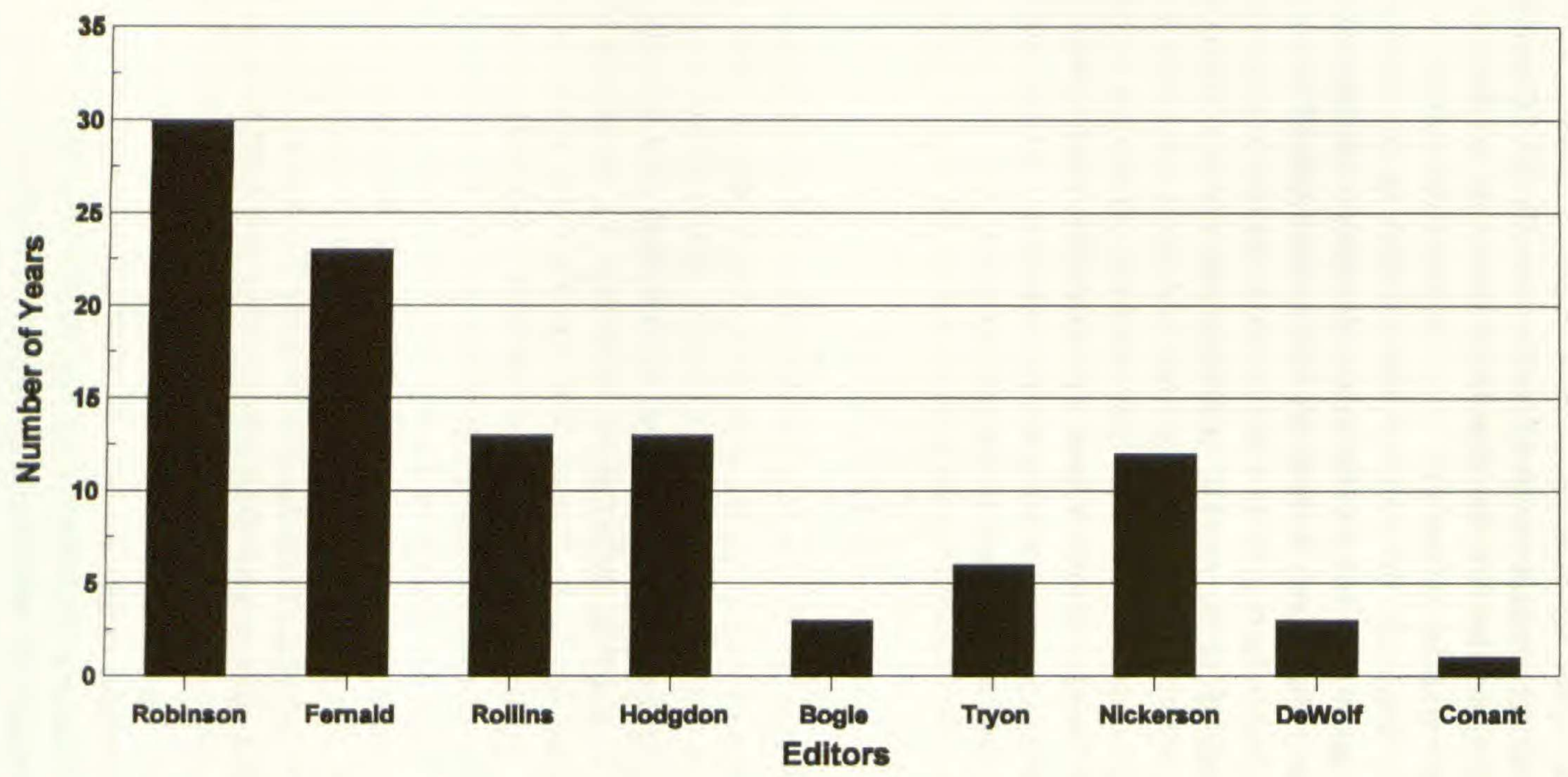


Figure 3. Illustration of the trend in decreasing tenure of Editors of *Rhodora*. When two Editor's terms overlap each has been rounded off to the full year.

couraging and supportive in the early years than they have been during my term thus far!

In addition to reflecting changes in the field of botany, *Rhodora* reflects the changes that have occurred in the membership of the New England Botanical Club. In its early years, the Club membership consisted of an approximately equal mixture of amateurs and professionals; in a 1995 survey 75% of the respondents listed themselves as students or professionals having employment related to botany. In addition, the early members of the Club were mostly “resident” members; that is, members who lived within 25 miles of Boston. By the time Fernald assumed the position of Editor-in-Chief, the journal boasted 33 Old World subscribers (Editorial 1929). Today the Club’s membership and subscribers range worldwide, and manuscripts are regularly submitted from outside of the U.S. One of the regular features of the journal, NEBC Meeting News, attempts to keep distant members informed of the content of our monthly seminars.

When he took on the job of Editor-in-Chief, Fernald began his term by publishing an overview of the accomplishments of the journal’s first 30 years (Editorial 1929). At that time, it was reasonable to relate such statistics as the number of new and total contributors per volume, and to name some of the more faithful contributors. Since then, many new, more specialized periodicals have begun publication, drawing papers away from the more general botanical journals such as *Rhodora*. Still, the journal has maintained publication of high quality papers on a variety of topics in botany. In addition, the elimination of page charges in 1996 has made publication in the journal more accessible to students and professionals with limited funds.

In his 1929 editorial announcement, Fernald took the opportunity to restate quite eloquently the parameters within which manuscripts should fit in order to be appropriate for publication in *Rhodora*: “The pages of *Rhodora* are not reserved . . . for members of the Club. They are freely open to all who care to use them, especially for the publication of tersely stated notes on range extensions or new or unrecorded facts regarding habits, morphology, habitats or other features of interest to students of all plants . . . or the natural history of plants. Systematic revisions and monographs of groups represented in the flora of northeastern North America will be welcomed for editorial consideration and well-written and descriptive (but not prolix) accounts of explo-

rations, containing a good share of new or significant observations, will be gladly considered. Mere lists without clear statement of the significance of the records are less desirable. Illustrations of new species and of newly recognized diagnostic characters are most desirable . . . Photographs of landscapes, unless they are remarkably sharp and of patent significance to the discussion, are undesirable for reproduction and, in general, *Rhodora* cannot commit itself to publish them. . . . Manuscripts which show serious lack of consistency will necessarily be returned for correction. In case of misquotations, erroneous citations and other inaccurate details in manuscripts the editors will naturally make corrections of obvious errors. They cannot, however, be expected to specially check such matters and it will be inferred that authors have themselves verified such essential details. Neither can the editorial board be held responsible . . . for all statements and conclusions presented by different authors. In the case of controversial subjects, with the desire to present both sides of a question, papers may be accepted for publication, though not representing the views of the editors." While the possibilities may seem a bit limited by today's standards, Fernald could not have anticipated the full range of submissions, especially the range of experimental techniques, available to researchers 70 years later.

The details of the discussions 100 years ago on the name of the new journal were not recorded in full. We know that *Taxus* was suggested in jest, and we know the other, serious considerations that were included in the vote. Apparently, some members felt that the name "Rhodora" was "too sentimental," perhaps because of the poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson, although that connection has not been mentioned elsewhere. Apparently, some members with more limited vision felt that the name "Rhodora" would be appropriate for a club whose members had a primary interest in plants with the same range (Editorial 1929; Howard 1996; Pease 1951). Whatever the thoughts of those 26 voting members in 1898, *Rhodora* now serves readers worldwide and, while concentrating on the flora of North America, information on related taxa and comparable ecological phenomena from beyond that limit are considered for publication.

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itorial staff, who have provided so much encouragement and support during my three years as Editor.

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